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The Mysticism of Music

By

R. Heber Newton

G. P. Putnam's Sons
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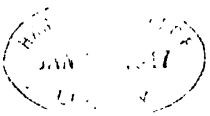

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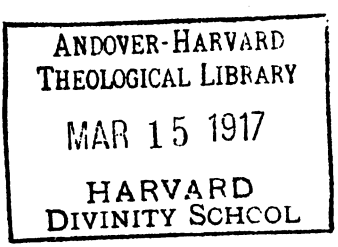

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Foreword

BEFORE the present volume was sent to press, the hand that penned it had ceased its labours. Several manuscripts were left by the author for publication, and these will later be presented to give some further message from that mind which was increasingly virile and clear, and from that pen which was active to the very end.

"The Mysticism of Music" had received its final revision from the author, and was left in readiness for publication. The volume is based upon two "lecture-sermons" given twenty-four years ago; but the shaping of the material for the press was completed in Bermuda during the winter of 1914.

F. M. N.

NEW YORK,
March, 1915.

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The Mysticism of Music

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I

The Mysticism of Music

"WAGNER is my religion." Thus spoke an enthusiast to a friend, remonstrating with him concerning his neglect of church-going. Wagner is one of the greatest masters of music. It was, then, music, as represented by Wagner, of which this enthusiast spoke. He meant what a certain abbé of Paris meant, when listening for the first time to Gluck's *Iphigenia:* "With such music one might found a new religion."

Both words are hyperbolic; but each contains a truth in exaggerated form. This thought is borne out by the language of the most philosophically minded of

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the masters of music, Wagner himself, concerning music. He calls it "Holy Music." He compares it with Christianity. Again and again, he makes it evident that, to him, all noble music is something so mystic, so sacred, so divine, as not to be separable from religion. "I found true art to be at one with true religion," he writes in one place. In another place he declares, still more strikingly, "Our own God still evokes much within us, and as [in the confusion wrought by materialistic physical science] He was about to vanish from our sight, He left us that eternal memorial of Himself, our music, which is the living God in our bosoms. Hence we preserve our music, and ward off from it all sacrilegious hands; for, if we obliterate or extinguish music, we extinguish the last light God has left burning within us, to point the way to find Him anew."

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In such expressions Wagner was but articulating more distinctly the thoughts and feelings which the noblest masters of music have cherished—as notably Beethoven.

This ought to be no surprise to the churchman who follows the Church Year intelligently. The Epiphany season, with which each New Year opens, brings to us the thought of God's manifestation of Himself to man, apart from all the narrow, ecclesiastical channels, otherwise than through religious dogmas; His manifestation of Himself to all mankind through all forms of truth and beauty and goodness. The Magi were led to Christ by the star—through their favourite study of astronomy. So truly wise men, in every line of science and art, may be led to the Christ of God through their favourite studies. The spirit of the Epiphanytide is expressed in the fine anthem so often

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sung at that season,—"Send out Thy light and Thy truth; let them lead me and bring me unto Thy holy hill."

Our modern world is not more distinctively the age of science than it is the age of music. Perhaps the truths which science has been sent to give men, blurring traditional faith, denying much of the theology of the priests and doctors, may find their corrective in the truths which music has been sent to teach, reflecting the theology of the mystics. Certainly, no narrow, dogmatic, ecclesiastical theology is to be looked for from music. You will never extricate the Thirty-nine Articles or the Westminster Confession from Beethoven. You may, however, find in music the poetic philosophy which is at the core of the Nicene Creed—the spirit, not the letter of that Creed. You cannot tell the formal religion of a musician from his music. What

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Protestant would know that Liszt was a Roman Catholic? The flooding tides of music swamp the little sheep-pens of the priest. The religion found in music is as large as man. It is the religion not of the church merely, but of the family, the school, the factory, and the capitol—the life of humanity in all its sacred secularity. "Its sacred secularity"—there is its secret. Restrained by the timid hands of ecclesiastics within the temple, shut up to canticle and oratorio and mass, music burst forth, poured itself into the life of the world, and lo! the cantata and symphony grow so serious, so earnest, that the feelings awakened in listening to them are indistinguishable from the feelings roused in the church; and now even the opera is seen to be capable of growing so mystic as to make a stage scene hush the soul with awe. Here is the broad thought known to all who love

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music intelligently, that it expresses, outside of the church, the highest principles of religion and morality, as they influence the sentiments and actions of men. Music vindicates thus the cardinal principle of true religion, its central article of faith—that human life, as such, is divine, that the secular is after all sacred. Why? Ponder this question, and the suggestions to be now offered may well be anticipated.

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I

Music, as we know it, was born into the world in the age of science. It is *the* art of the age of knowledge. We need not, then, be surprised to find that music is not an art merely, that it is a science as well. This, which is true of all arts, is pre-eminently true of music. It is intellectual as well as emotional. It deals with thoughts as much as with feelings. Its contents are ideas. Musicians are measured in the scale of music by their intellectuality. Note the intellectual majesty which crowns the heads of the great masters of music. Handel and Mozart and Beethoven lift above us heads as of the immortals. Intellectuality is stamped on every line of their faces.

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Music can never cease to be emotional, because thought, in proportion as it is deep and earnest, always trembles into feelings. When one philosophizes after the fashion of Plato, his profoundest passages grow rhythmic and passionate, his paragraphs become prose poems, which cannot be read without the hearer thrilling as under the strains of heavenly music. The loftier the genius of the composer, the nobler his nature, the loftier will be the themes with which he deals, the nobler the thoughts which blossom into feeling through his art.

We need not be surprised when the great philosopher from whom Wagner learned so much found himself compelled to recognize "in music itself an Idea of the World." This saying Wagner interprets as meaning that, "He who could explain music to us wholly in concepts would at the same time have produced a

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philosophy explaining the world." Or, as he puts it in another place, "In Beethoven's music the world explains itself as definitely to every consciousness as the most profound philosophy could explain it to a thinker well versed in the most abstract conceptions." So that it is a fundamental conviction with Wagner that, "in music the Idea of the World manifests itself."

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II

Whence then does music draw its philosophy?

Music is not an imitation of nature. Nature provides no ready-made models of melody or harmony, as she provides perfect types of form and colour. Hints she gives of music, but only hints. Man evolves music from within his own nature. It is distinctively the *human* art. It comes forth in the awakening self-consciousness of man. Music expresses the awakening self-consciousness of man, as he confronts the mystery of the universe, only to find a deeper mystery within himself. The marvellous creations of modern music are studies in self-consciousness; attempts to run the gamut of man's

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moods, to fathom the problems of his being, to find a voice for

> An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light.

Music is, then, man's interpretation of the mystery of the nature found without him, by the secrets of the nature found within him. It is the universe read in terms of self-consciousness.

According to music, then, man himself is to yield us our highest philosophy of the universe. We must accept the thought given within his mind as our highest and truest thought of the universe. We must implicitly trust that thought, as the most adequate manifestation of the Infinite and Eternal Energy which animates nature and which rises within man as self-consciousness.

In this thought, music is at one with philosophy; whose masters, from Plato

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on, have always busied themselves with the study of man, accepting the conceptions which man's nature gives of the mystery of the universe, and trusting those conceptions. In this, music, also, is at one with poetry, the greatest masters of which likewise find their absorbing theme in man. Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Browning, use nature as the setting for the study of man.

In contrast with the physical science of our age, which concerns itself wholly with the physical universe, the art of our age, music, concerns itself with the metaphysical universe—the universe above and beyond the realm of physics; having in this the authority of philosophy and poetry. Music bids us look within, if we would find our highest conception of the Idea of the World; trust that conception arising in man's self-conscious-

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ness, as the truest attainable mirror of the Infinite and Eternal Energy, and lean our whole weight on the affirmations of human personality.

There is in this one principle a whole theology in a nutshell. No man ever doubts of God or immortality who trusts the instincts and intuitions of his own nature, who relies on the trustworthiness of the affirmations of consciousness.

And if one's own self-consciousness be clouded, through the imperfect development of his being, let a man trust the consciousness of the masters of music, since they are at one with the masters of philosophy and poetry: and, finding them devout, religious, hopeful, trustful, let him be sure that "The Idea of the World," manifesting itself in holy music and in holy philosophy and in holy poetry, is the true vision, and let him be at peace.

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The great musicians of an age are its interpreters, the priests of nature, leading us within the most holy place of the universe—the soul of man.

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III

What do we find in entering this holy place, led by "Holy Music"?

We find a realm of the invisible, as this inner sphere of life. All sciences lead us up to the threshold of this inner creation, this unseen universe, throw the door ajar and point us within. All arts press through the open door into the vestibule of this inner temple. Music takes us by the hand, boldly leads us within, closes the door after us, and then leaves us alone in this inner world. In his oration upon Beethoven, Wagner wrote—"As soon as the first measures, only, of one of Beethoven's divine symphonies are heard, the entire phenomenal world, which impenetrably hems us in on

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every side, suddenly vanishes into nothingness; music extinguishes it as sunshine does lamplight. In music's enigmatically entwined lines and wonderfully intricate characters stand written the eternal symbols of a new and different world."

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IV

This inner, unseen world makes itself felt, under the spell of music, as a most real world; nay, as *the* real world, the only real world. He who, in listening to a great symphony, forgets himself, forgets those about him, forgets the outer world of things seen and sensible, sitting with eyes closed and ears sealed—is carried away on "the golden tides of music's sea," until he feels himself in the presence of thoughts and ideas which seem the true reality of life. To come back to the crowds on the Boulevard, the Avenue, the Square, and the garish light of the world of "reality," as men term it, is to him, then, to drop into the world of appearances, illusions, shams and un-

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realities. That which all sciences hint and all arts declare, music confirms, as with the oath of the Eternal Himself—"the things which are seen are temporal; the things which are unseen are eternal."

Beethoven, in his latter days, became almost completely deaf. Sitting before his piano and playing upon it, he could not hear a sound. Yet tender melodies and marvellous harmonies poured forth from his fingers; not as the results of composition, but as the transcripts of the music which the deaf man heard somewhere. "*Heard*," I say, for this music was heard, with a most real hearing, as he himself tells us. Heard within, pulsing through the inner realm, invisible, inaudible. Ponder this fact for a moment, quietly, and it will be seen that we are taking a solid step forward when we go on to affirm our next thought.

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V

Music reveals the reality of Spirit; not merely of my spirit or of your spirit, but of Spirit, "writ large"; of what the Hindoos meant by "The Self." Music brings us face to face with a most real world, in which is the manifestation of a most real Power; a Power not ourselves, greater than us all; before us, round about us; in which we, with all things living, live and move and have our being.

This is not rhapsodizing or sentimentalizing. It is speaking soberly of this reality, into whose presence music leads us; this realm unseen, unseeable, within the phenomenal world, through which surge the tides of music's golden sea; melodies enrapturing, harmonies

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most heavenly, of which the music that we hear in the great symphonies is but the faint echo, thrown out upon the audible world. As the masters who have passed within this mystic sphere tell us, in such rapt experiences they do not compose, they listen; they do not invent, they copy; and their noblest works are the memories of these strains which no ear may hear. They are possessed by another and larger life, another and larger being, the Life, the Being which animates the world within, invisible, inaudible, yet most real. Their spirits open, and the Infinite and Eternal Spirit within all life pours in and fills them to overflowing.

The deaf Beethoven thus heard that which enabled him to interpret the varied phases and moods of nature's existence, of man's whole life. "And now the musician's eye became enlightened from within. He now cast his glance upon

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phenomena which, illumined by his inner light, were reimparted in wonderful reflex to his soul. Now, again, the essence of the nature of things alone speaks to him, displaying them to him in the calm light of beauty. He now understands the forest, the brook, the meadow, the blue ether, the merry throng, the pair of lovers, the song of birds, the flying clouds, the roar of the storm, the bliss of beatific repose."

How could this be, unless he had found the Spirit which is the life of all things?

And thus a notable change passed over Beethoven himself. His natural melancholy, aggravated so pitifully in the early stages of his infirmity, lightened into a serenity which, if not joy, was at least peace; and he seemed to have found the mystic secret of life. How shall we speak of this mystic experience save in the words of the great master of our day, who

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tells of finding through music, "The God within the human breast, of whom our greatest mystics have always been so certainly and so luminously conscious."

The genius of one of the greatest of French masters of fiction makes this experience perfectly clear. Balzac gives us, in Louis Lambert, this picture of the culmination of musical inspiration, in his description of the improvisations of a genius. "Here Gambara fell into ecstasy, improvising the most melodious and harmonious cavatina that Andrea had ever heard; a song divine, divinely sung; a theme of grace comparable only to that of the *O filii et filiæ*, and full of charm which none but a musical genius of the highest order could have given. The Count was filled with admiration. The clouds were breaking, heaven's blue shining forth; angelic forms appeared, and raised the veils that hid the sanctuary;

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the light of heaven streamed down in torrents; silence soon reigned. The Count, surprised to hear no more, looked up at Gambara, who, with fixed eyes and rigid body, stammered the word—'GOD.'"

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VI

This is the language of the mystic, not of the ecclesiastic, and as such is unsatisfactory to the theological Gradgrinds, who never feel that they have an idea unless they can condense it and see it; who never think they have a belief unless they can bottle it in a dogma, analyze it, resolve it, label it and store it away among the things which they have exhausted of mystery. Vague this thought of God is, and rightfully so. Vague it must ever be; as vague as the reality transcending our human thinking, making itself felt as reality, while eluding any clearing up by the understanding. The dogmatist would place in our hands a telescope to resolve the spiritual nebulæ. The mystic

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knows that no such lenses have been ground, and humbly offers us the glass which will bring within the field of the inner vision the reality which we can never hope to map. The mystic's thought of God has always been thus rightfully vague. Herein it is the only thought which can meet the need of the age whose science has at least impressed on man, never again to be lost, the truth of the ancient word: "We can by searching find out God." To the age of science, taught that the Infinite and Eternal Energy which is manifested in the overwhelmingly vast universe now opening on man's vision must for ever be beyond human comprehension—to this age of science, finding its highest eloquence of worship in silence, ordering as the ritual of its holiest hours the finger upon the lips, comes music, the art of the modern world; with a revelation of the reality of

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the Infinite and Eternal Soul of all things, whom it manifests within the mind of man; giving us the name for ever sacred to the soul, as the consecrated symbol through which successive ages have declared the faith transcending all definition, and whispering—"*God.*"

Do you fear that in this vagueness there will be loss of power? The thoughts of music are certainly vague, but therein lies their power. Music of the highest order scarcely needs words to express its meaning to the listener—being itself poetry. You are not helped, ordinarily, in the following of a great work by the notes of the programme. A libretto is helpful to the interpretation of a musical drama only when written by a genius who is at once poet and musician. If you surrender yourself to the music itself, become enraptured with it, you feel the meaning of it, though you

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cannot put that meaning into words. Words may only becloud the vision of the soul. Mendelssohn entitled his exquisite collection—"Songs without Words." Can there be such songs without words? You do not doubt it after listening to these wordless strains, whose thoughts and feelings could not be clearer by any articulation of speech. All the greatest thoughts are thoughts too deep for words. Are they unreal, therefore? Is not their power in the speechless wonder with which they thrill us? Words are only intellectual symbols, signs for thoughts, suggesting what they cannot worthily express; and musical notation is only an emotional symbolism, suggesting that which, as feeling, lies beyond all words and thoughts. "Where words end, there music begins."

The greater the thought, the intenser the feeling which it generates—the more

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surely does it pass out of the intellect into the heart, cease to be a mere thought, and become a mental and spiritual apprehension deeper than all conscious thinking. As Mr. Haweis writes in *Music and Morals:* "Once raise a thought to its highest power, and it not only is accompanied by the highest emotion, but, strange to say, actually passes out of the condition of a thought altogether, into the condition of an emotion; just as a hard metal, raised to a sufficient power of heat, evaporates into the most subtle and attenuated gas."

Wordsworth thus writes of the highest experience of man:

Such was the Boy—but for the growing youth
What soul was his, when, from the naked top
Of some bold headland he beheld the sun
Rise up and bathe the world in light! He looked—
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
And ocean's liquid mass beneath him lay

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In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were
touched,
And in their silent faces did he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy: his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul and form
All melted into him: they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion, which transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the Power
That made him: it was blessedness and love.

Thus the musician becomes the fit theologian of our age, making us feel the reality of the Infinite and Eternal Spirit whom we name God, and hushing us in the awe of silence, though in the perfect peace of trust.

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VII

"The perfect peace of trust." For this Spirit, before whom music leads us to bow in worship, is so revealed to us as, even in our most speechless feeling, to make us sure that It is trustworthy; to assure us that we may say, not It, but He. For, to end with the note with which we began, whither does music lead us, as into the holy place of this awful presence? Within the soul of man. What is the mirror in which this Mystic Face is reflected? The soul of man. How do we come to perceive this vision? By awakening into self-consciousness. The human personality is, then, the revelation of God. That can only mean that we must think of God, if we think of

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Him at all, in terms drawn from human nature; that we must conceive of God as the Perfect Man, the source and spring of human nature. Its ground and root is then a Being who, however He may transcend personality, cannot be less than personal; of whom the only worthy name is the child's word, the word of the child soul, of the Eternal Child within The Nazarene—"Our Father which art in heaven."

So, through our mysterious human nature, with its mind, its heart, its conscience, rises dimly the shadow of a Being of Infinite Truth, Infinite Beauty, Infinite Goodness, and we know the profound meaning of The Christ's words: "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit"—the Spirit revealed through holy music—"unto

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them that love him?" *Love*—that is the central word in the mystery of man. It is the core of his being, round which all grows. It is the divinest element in our human nature. It is the best image of the Father of our spirits. Of Beethoven, his great interpreter wrote: "His soul of souls said to him—'Love is God'; and so he, too, decreed: 'God is love.'"

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VIII

"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." He who in the mystic's vision, through poetry or philosophy or music, or through the spiritual experiences of the search after goodness, finds God, finds that we, too, live and move and have our being in Him, and that, because He is, we shall be also. He cannot die who is in God. Immortality is bound up with the faith in God. So, again, "Holy Music" makes perfectly clear this faith of the human heart, which is the corollary of the faith in God. In that pathetic will which Beethoven wrote, he thus expressed his own onlook: "I go to meet death *with joy*." And one feels, as he reads Beethoven's words about

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death, that his joy was one passing his understanding; a whisper which he did not clearly interpret, whereof the feeling was truer than the thought. He seemed to think of death—but his feeling of joy was the breath of life from "the land of the living."

How true this is, let us learn from the death of another great master. "One evening, toward sunset, Chopin, who had lain insensible for many hours, suddenly rallied. He observed the Countess, draped in white, standing at the foot of the bed. She was weeping bitterly. 'Sing,' murmured the dying man. She had a lovely voice. It was a strange request, but so earnest a one that his friends wheeled the piano from the adjoining parlour to his bedroom door; and there, as the twilight, deepening with the last rays of the setting sun, streamed into the room, the Countess

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sang that famous canticle to the Virgin which, it is said, once saved the life of Stradella. 'How beautiful it is!' he exclaimed: 'My God, how beautiful!—again—again!' In another moment he swooned away."

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IX

Thus, unless I have followed her leadings blindly, "Holy Music" comes to us as a prophet from Samaria, revealing to our age of darkened spiritual vision the mystic faith which the Church has imperfectly breathed, through her dogmatic creeds and ecclesiastical institutions, in the suffering soul of men. Close your Bibles, if you will, go away from your churches, if you please, but think not to escape the necessity of a theology. Close your Bibles, if you must, drop out from your churches, if you cannot attend them, but think not thus to lose the theology which ever has breathed through the Bible and ever has vitalized the Church. Outer body of dead wood may

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die and fall away, when its time comes. Inner life and soul can never die, while sciences hint and arts lift the veil and holy music leads us within that veil before the altar. Profoundly significant is it that, in this age when men turn away from the accredited prophets, these other voices of the soul make themselves heard, in clear, calm tones; giving us again the mystic's vision and the mystic's faith.

Thus may we hear The Eternal saying unto the Daughter of His Voice, "Holy Music":

> Lo, I have given thee
> To understand my presence and to feel
> My fulness: I have filled thy lips with power.
> I have raised thee nigher to the sphere of heaven,
> Man's first, last home; and thou, with ravished sense,
> Listenest the lordly music falling from
> Th' illimitable years.

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II

The Christian Mysticism of Music

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II

The Christian Mysticism of Music

RICHARD II., while listening to the strains of music outside his dungeon walls, exclaims:

> Blessing on his heart that gives it me,
> For 'tis a sign of love.

If music be, indeed, a sign of love, it is the symbol, the sacrament, of the one spiritual reality which is at the heart of the Christian creed, which is at the core of being.

In our previous chapter, we saw grounds to declare that, if we should feel constrained to close our Bibles and wander

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from the Church, we should still find a theology in music, and that theology the underlying theology of all noble religion —Theism. "Holy Music" reveals to us the thought, the conviction, the faith of God, as the Immanent Life of nature, the Spirit indwelling man.

Is there anything more suggested by music than this pure Theism? Unquestionably there is. Nothing less, indeed, than the true Christian Theism; not only the Idea of the World, but the distinctively Christian Idea of the World.

Such a statement need not surprise us, who know the history of modern music. It is the child of Christianity. It was born in the Church. Its cradle was upon the altar. Its first cry was a mass.

Again, let it be said, we are to expect not the letter of the Christian Creed, but its spirit; not the secondary accretions of Reformation theology, but the inner and

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vital thought of the Catholic theology, the theology of the Nicene Fathers; and not this as misunderstood by ecclesiastics, but as understood by the mystics—the only class who hold the key to the Nicene Creed.

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I

There is a science as well as an art in music. Art there is in music, unquestionably. At first sight it seems altogether an art, a skill achieved by genius, unaccountably transcending all rules.

The boy gifted with a genius for music begins to play after his own sweet will. In the old barn or up in the garret, away from the family, he steals to be alone with his fiddle, surrendering himself to his boyish improvisations, which know no law. If he be set at work under a master, he cannot keep behind the plodding steps of the pedagogue, but leaps in a bound to a mastery of his art, such as dazzled the world in the boy Mozart. With the growing consciousness of power, he over-

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leaps all recognized systems and defies all known rules; accomplishing marvels such as those with which Paganini astonished the musical world. Yet is he only flying over the terra firma of a science, along which mere talent plods wearily. That terra firma of fixed rule, of rigid system, is there, beneath him, and, but for it, genius could not fly in its atmosphere of inspiration. The masters may never know the principles on which they work, the system which runs through their work. Turner did not know the geology which he illustrated in his pictures of the Alpine rock strata. The boy Mozart did not know that all his wizard actions were reducible to a science. Yet, when the critic comes to study genius, he discovers that these defiances of rule are but the actions of a higher rule, protests against conventionality, expansions one and all of law. He finds that the

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master's beautiful chords and progressions thence are not capricious violations of rule, possible to genius though unattainable by ordinary composers. There proves to be nothing hap-hazard in the work of genius. All turns out to be orderly, methodical, accordant with law.

So the rules which are laid down for the student prove to be but the translation, into consciously recognized methods, of the unconscious processes of the master—a systematizing of the practices of genius for the use of talent. The master's magical action was the unconscious, instinctive movement of mind along the lines of law, which criticism clears for all to see and follow. Art is thus the forerunner of science; and the master's use of harmonies, which are justifiable at the time by no known laws, are justified then in their effects, and, later on, by a larger knowledge.

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The rules of musical art are, thus, not arbitrary, but necessary, natural. What seem to be empirical rules, drawn from the practice of the masters, prove to rest upon natural principles, by which, unknowingly, the masters wrought.

Thus a science opens beneath the art of music—and the magical realm of harmony proves to be but one sphere of the universal reign of law.

In the familiar tradition which has come down from history, Pythagoras discovered the musical scale by watching certain blacksmiths, pounding iron in a smithy. Observing, reflecting, experimenting upon the sounds which he there heard, the simple, physical secret of sound revealed itself to him—the law which the child learns, when he takes a number of pieces of glass and by arranging them in different lengths produces a scale, and makes a tune. We know now

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that the magic of music can be learned and practised, that the wizard genius works upon fixed principles, that the most bewilderingly beautiful harmonies are all expressions of mathematical relationships, that in the world of sound there is a reign of law. Tennyson's fine touch sums the mystery of music, in a pregnant word:

> And music in the bounds of law.

Thus we find in music the secret of the universe. There is no fear that our age will miss this open secret in the realm of science. We may, however, discover it quite as clearly in the realm of art.

The great art-critic, Winkelmann, studied the Apollo Belvidere with a minuteness of criticism never given before; and discovered that every most seemingly careless sweep of its beautiful lines reveals the action of exactest mathematics.

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He found that he could give the secret of that classic statue in terms of figures; that its charm was a matter of scientific proportion; that he could write the formula for each curve of that noble form.

The realm of the beautiful is, equally with the realm of the true and the good, under the universal reign of law.

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II

Yet, further, as we thus find hinted to us in the secret of music, all laws are correlated. The law of one sphere proves to be the law of other spheres. We may translate a law of physics into terms of æsthetics and of ethics.

When Winkelmann found the law governing the lines of the Apollo Belvidere, he found it in terms not of art, but of mathematics. He found a mathematical statement of the law of proportion which shaped every curve of that wonderful form.

It is only as we break up into bits of men—clergyman and other such professional manikin,—that we fancy the laws of our individual spheres to be isolated.

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The men in whom the various powers of life blend know that all spheres of life are concentric, that the laws of one world are the laws of all worlds.

This was the fertile thought which inspired Goethe, in those marvellous guesses at truth which anticipated some of the greatest discoveries of modern savants. I shall never forget the enthusiasm with which a great-brained friend, whose friendship grows dearer to me as the years of that privileging comradeship recede, followed the Ariadne clue to this knowledge. Himself artist and musician and lover of science, he one day left my side in a railway train to talk with a musician whom I had introduced to him. For an hour or two, he talked absorbingly; returning to my side with his face all aglow, to assure me that he had found a certain law of form, which he was seeking, in a law of sound which he had

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learned from my musical friend—as he had long hoped would prove the case. In despair of discovering that law in art, he found it in music.

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III

Nor is it only that all spheres manifest this interchange of thought, but, from Winkelmann's study of the Apollo, we learn that this universal mystery of law, reigning everywhere, one and the same through all spheres, translating itself from one tongue to another, finds its highest term in the language of that art which we are now studying. In the secret of music we hold the key to that universe in which is the reign of law.

Shakespeare is thought to be merely poetizing when he describes the universe in that glowing vision familiar to us all:

> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins.

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Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

Yet this is what all great poets have seen, declaring, in some form, the conviction of Emerson, that:

The world was built in order,
And the atoms march in tune.

The language of poetry is the language of philosophy. The oldest, most widespread, and most insistent of the clues to the problem of the universe has been found in that mystic doctrine of numbers which Pythagoras first taught our Western world. He meant, as all mystics have meant, that the inner law of the creation is a law of proportion. If we could find that inner law of the universe, it would be expressed in terms of numbers, it would reveal a science of proportion. Thus the movements of nature would

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prove to be a harmony; and, if we had ears fine enough to hear, we should listen in calm hours to a music of the spheres.

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IV

Let me give you three striking illustrations of these high thoughts of law to which we have been led. Some years ago, the great savant, John Tyndall, made certain curious experiments in the translation of colours into sounds. Arranging a row of various coloured lights, by a very simple mechanism he caused the vibrations of the light-waves to translate themselves into sound-waves, and thus produced a sound for each colour, a prism of sound.

Within recent years, a very curious book has been given to the English-speaking people. It is the result of long study by a man of remarkable meta-

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physical powers and of equally remarkable mathematical powers. Early in life, he conceived the idea that—since the synthetic laws of mathematics express the inner and cosmic laws of proportion, through and by which all life is ordered—philosophy itself might be translatable into terms of metaphysics; that a mathematical diagram might be drawn in which the fundamental postulates of philosophy should be expressed to the eye. Working out along the lines of metaphysics, by the severest and most logical processes, he reached the great ultimate thoughts in which the universe has ever centred; and then, by his rare mathematical talent, he was enabled to express these formulas in forms visible to the eye—in mathematical diagrams. What was the result? Certain great typical forms, exquisitely beautiful, marvellously proportioned, which proved to be

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the great typical forms of the flower world.[1]

But more than this, these very flower forms prove to be those which we find through the universe—from crystals to the convolutions of certain vast nebulæ scattered through space. They thus prove to be cosmic forms—universal and essential.

Some years ago, a rarely gifted musician, to whom I am indebted for much stimulating thought, showed me certain photographs which he had just received from England. They were pictures of most subtle, mathematical figures, which were, at the same time, exquisitely beautiful forms, strangely suggestive of the great typical forms of the flower world. And my friend thus interpreted to me these puzzling pictures. Some time before, a scientific musician bethought him of

[1] *Geometrical Psychology.*—Betts.

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making the chords of music record the lines of their sound-waves, so that the eye could have a picture of the forms thus produced. Suspending fine pens from the wires of a piano, so that they should move delicately over sheets of paper, by striking the chords carefully and allowing the sound to die out naturally, he succeeded in making the vibrations of the sound-wave of each chord trace the lines of its movements. The results were designs of mathematical exactness, of exquisite beauty, strangely suggesting the great typical flower forms. These diagrams were thus the expression, to the eye, of the music which the ear hears; the audible world translated into the visible world; the revelation of a mystery until then unseen by human eye, ungrasped by human thought.

If one studies these diagrams carefully and lets the thoughts which they awaken

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lead him out amid the mysteries of the cosmos—then in the vision which they open of the mystery of law, of the law which is everywhere present, acting in all life, directing all, controlling all, everywhere one and the same, where will he find himself? Before the one supreme mystery of the universe, of which all theology is an expression, in which all faith rests.

This vision is that which the great mystics of all ages and creeds have beheld, and which, in such dim fashion as speech could render, they have sought to picture before men, in philosophic thought. This was the vision which the great Alexandrian Hebrew beheld; he who was indirectly instrumental in shaping the form of philosophy into which the early Christian Church ran its speculation concerning the Man in whom the moral law lived perfectly; the vision which

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he pictured, as best he could, in a noble eulogy of law:

"For God, as Shepherd and King, governs according to Law and Justice, like a flock of sheep, the earth and water and air and fire, and all the plants and living things that are in them, whether they be mortal or divine, as well as the courses of heaven and the periods of sun and moon, and the variations and harmonious revolutions of the other stars; having appointed His true Word, His First-Begotten Son, to have the care of this great flock, as the Vicegerent of a great King."[1]

This was the vision before our Yankee mystic, the Hindoo seer of Concord, when, closing the wonderful strain of the "Woodnotes," he declares that—

Conscious Law is King of Kings.

[1] Philo.

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The universe under law, all law one, that law immanent in nature, directing all, ruling all,—what is this but the very presence and action of the Infinite and Eternal Intelligence, God?

Gaining this vision, we reach the heart of the Christian Faith, we hold the key to the Nicene Creed, whose doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation of the Logos are but the expressions of this very thought, world-old and world-wide. The Nicene Fathers, as we can now see, were shaping a cosmology and theology in one; a cosmic theology; a theology which finds the secret of the universe in the Law everywhere present, all ruling, all directing; itself the Vicegerent of the Infinite and Eternal Intelligence, God. That indwelling Law of creation seemed to these fathers none other than God Himself; yet, as it were, a secondary form of the God, who, in His essential nature,

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transcends all human thought. Thus they conceived of a dual God; the Father, transcendent, unknowable, who in creation manifests Himself partially, so that the universe is an image of Him, His Only-Begotten Son.

This Law divine is not merely the law of the material creation but of the moral order. It is not only a law physical, but a law ethical, acting with moral aim, in moral beings, toward moral ends; working towards the creation of character. God is the Good One, ever moving to lift all life into goodness, and so into Himself; thus reconciling man unto God. The Good Man, who perfectly realizes the idea, the thought of God, in man; who embodies in an individual the moral energy which is working in the universe —this Man we rightly identify with that divine Logos or Law which is immanent in nature, indwelling man, the life and

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soul of all things, the redeeming and reconciling power of God in humanity. Thus we affirm—"The Word was made flesh."

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V

On the surface of things, it does not seem as though law was thus ordering all things in nature and mastering all powers in man—out-working a moral purpose.

Law in nature does not seem to have morally mastered the universe. It is everywhere holding the millions of stars which the monster Lick telescope reveals, in the harmonious movements of a beautiful physical order; but where, men say, are the more harmonious movements of a beautiful moral order in nature? Strife and discord seem everywhere present. The very law of progress appears to be the savage struggle of existence. Everywhere, to the inquiry of a tender conscience, it has seemed to man that—

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Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shrieked against his creed.

Discord is everywhere—but *harmony?* And the story of man, is it not also one of law in the lower and physical nature, but of lawlessness in the spirit? The savage struggle for existence, does it not reproduce itself in the history of man? He dreams of laws of goodness, but they fail to order his life into the harmonies of character. He dreams of heavenly purity, and wallows in the lusts of the flesh. He dreams of angelic self-control, and reels along the street with the unsteady step of the drunkard. He dreams of divine justice, and sanctions with religion a social order of cruel injustice. He dreams of universal brotherhood, and finds the mainspring of civilization still in selfishness. The vices and crimes of human nature, the ruin which sin works—

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this is the pathos of history, the mystery over which tragedy broods, with endless fascination. There seems to us no mastery of an immoral chaos by moral law, as there must be, if the Christian Creed is the true interpretation of that Conscious Law which is King of Kings. Discord, not harmony, seems to prevail, and life appears no order, but a sad disorder.

We turn to music, and find the key of the puzzle.

In the latest born, the highest of the arts, the most central of the sciences, there is discord. That discord measures the superiority of modern music to ancient music. Ancient music was melodic. One strain flowed in a sweet unison of peace and purity, but as an unevolved and rudimentary art. Modern music, the music of the man, as distinguished from the music of the child, is char-

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acterized by harmony. The scientific music, through which thought speaks and law rules, seems to the uneducated ear largely discord. The highest harmonies are always trembling on the perilous edge of utter discord. To climb to harmony we must mount by the way of discord. Discord is imperfect harmony.

To the ear accustomed to the simple melodious strains of rudimentary music, the musical dramas of Wagner seem only dissonance.

When I stand before a great orchestra, it seems to me that I am in the presence of a symbol of the universe.

If I am too near to any of the instruments, the effect is not harmonious, but discordant. One instrument dominates the others, clashes with the rest, seems out of harmony with the mass of sound. If I would understand the secret of that mighty mass of sound, I must stand where

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the instruments blend. Even there, too, my inner ear must listen, and co-ordinate the separate and clashing sounds, duly. That mighty orchestration is only possible by the development of the individual parts, which seem to be forever running away with all order and rushing into chaos. You cannot have a Tristan and Isolde without this dissonance of various instruments, apparently clashing, yet, at the right distance, co-ordinating into harmony.

The captious critic of the universe stands so close to creation that he fails to co-ordinate the jarring instruments into a symphony. He forgets that, as Pope long ago saw, we too should see:

All nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood.

Nor has he found the truth which the philosopher-poet of modern India,

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Rabindranath Tagore, has learned in his inner experience:

"When Thou commandest me to sing, it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to Thy face, and tears come to my eyes.

"All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony—and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea."

As I stand before the great orchestra, I am self-condemned, again, if, in my impatience, I will not hear the work out; thus to find how the clashing dissonance, which seems to me only discord running riot, is on the way to the pure harmony in which it melts at length. What interpretation of the great symphony or music-drama can there be which fails patiently to follow on the stress and strain of the earlier movements into the reconciliation of the final harmony, with

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its peace serene, seraphic, its joy unspeakable and full of glory? The ancients used to speak of man as the spectator of the drama of the universe. If he would rightly judge that drama, he must see it out. He must, at the least, refrain from criticism upon the work whose issue he does not see and hear.

The final harmony of a great symphony is not merely auditory, but intellectual and spiritual. It is not only the harmony which the ear hears, but the inner harmony of which it is the expression, the ultimate harmoniousness of life. It expresses, sacramentally, the close of the battle of life, the issue of the tragedy of life; and the outward and visible sign—the heavenly harmony—is the sacrament of the inward and spiritual grace, the good thing given of God, the victory, the reconciliation, the restoration; salvation from sin, character won, God found.

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This is the inner secret of that strain of peace and hope with which the heavenly knight bids adieu to the scene of suffering and temptation, of sin and sorrow, in Lohengrin.

Through what storm and struggle does Beethoven express, in the immortal Ninth Symphony, the turmoil and perturbation of the soul of man; its seemingly vain and fruitless effort to find satisfaction, the discord which prevails within, unreconciled, unharmonized. The clashing sounds of the multitudinous instruments of the great orchestra seem but the audible sign and symbol of that inner discord in which man's powers strive in vain for harmony. But there rises from the harsh dissonance a soft, sweet strain, simple as the song of a child, serene as the song of the seraphs. Lost again in the great tumult, once more it emerges; losing itself and re-emerging, again and again; each time

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growing clearer, rising stronger, mounting higher, until at length it bursts forth in that matchless song of peace and joy which has forever shrined, in perfect form, the bliss of the human soul, attaining its goal, gaining the end of its being, reconciling its powers, finding itself in God.

Our great scientific musician distinctly declares that Beethoven's problem in that Symphony was to find in music the original type of human purity, a strain expressive of the ideal Good Man of his creed.

"In precisely that work, the deliberately recalling Will of its Creator unmistakably prevails. We meet its expression without any intermediation. When, to the raging of the desperation that after each silencing constantly returns, as with the cry of fright of one awakening from a fearful dream, that Will calls out in the actually spoken word, the ideal sense of which is none other than—'Man is good after all.'"

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VI

And thus we return to the thought with which we began, having completed the circle. Music is the sign of love. Love is the central reality of life. It is the secret of the power which is working through all things, creating, redeeming, restoring. It is the symbol of that Triune God, who is at once Creator, Redeemer, and Reconciler. So, again, Wagner writes of Beethoven, expressing the ultimate truth to which he reached and which he prophetically revealed through music: "His soul of souls said to him—'Love is God'; and so he too decreed—'God is love.'"

It is what Browning, the most virile

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poet of our day, tells us in the conclusion of his noble poem, "Saul":

All's love, yet all's law.

There is a reign of law, and that law is love. "God is love." Jesus is the Christ of God, the incarnation of that divine love. He is the Saviour who has come to save us from our sins, by breathing within us that moral energy, that spiritual life, in which all the discords of earth shall be lifted into the harmonies of heaven; and man shall gain the mastery of himself, and be at peace.

It is a fundamental law of musical composition that great works should begin and end in the same key. That great poem, that great symphony which we call the universe, began in love divine. It will close in love human made divine, the love of God outworking itself in the

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love of man, reconciling all things unto itself.

Handel desired that he might die on a Good Friday. On that day which commemorates the dying love of a man in whom the living love of God is seen, as in a sacrament of flesh, the spirit of the great musician passed away; to find the secret of his earthly harmonies in that love, infinite and eternal, which is working out the redemption of all life, the lifting of all discord into harmony, the mastering of all sin into goodness.

THE END

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